

10-23-09 Truth Be Told

Do you remember being a child and asking questions about the unknown? And, if your parent realized you were concerned and the parent was wise, you received an honest answer, albeit a simple age-appropriate one. The children of overly protective parents or those lacking the wisdom of understanding the child's need for truth were told very little. Those young people did not stop worrying, though, just because they were told to not worry.

Children intuitively know when they are not being told the whole story. When they are not helped to fill in the gaps, they will fill them in all by themselves and, believe me, their nightmares are scarier than any truth and their conclusions may not even be close to it.

To a certain degree, we remain like children, craving truth and honesty. Being adults, all the more frustrating it is, when we believe that, if we can just find the right source, we can find the answers. And then we can make plans, feel prepared.

I thought I was in touch with the "right sources" for making plans and preparations for H1N1. And with those sources I stayed informed. I read updates daily. Participated in conference calls weekly. Registered to receive vaccine. Bought a refrigerator. Reminded people of the constant importance of preventing the spread of illness. Met with other departments to discuss emergency dispensing site plans. Contacted all the licensed nurses in town and had their information on a database, ready to go for vaccination clinics. Thought and thought some more about the details. What was needed? What would help?

Sure, I felt some frustration about delays and the spotty arrival of small numbers of doses of H1N1 here and there. But I really felt that all would be OK soon. Soon. In the meantime, I thought people should be told why there are delays and why there are only small batches being delivered.

Only last week, I passed along my concern to someone in emergency preparedness at MDPH. The reason could be as "simple" as the reality that this vaccine is cultured in eggs and there is only so much you can do when telling those chickens to hurry up and lay more eggs. If that were the case, it would be better for people to hear that than to wonder.

Of course, explanations also raise questions. So be it. For instance, if we are waiting on the chickens, then what were the plans for this pandemic that we've been told for years now was "Not a matter of if but a matter of when"? I don't know but last week that was my biggest concern. It was time for people to hear some explanations.

Now that concern has multiplied exponentially. Here's what happened last week: In a conference call for health agents, we were told that the "Whitehouse sent a request to all the state's departments of public health, asking for volunteers for a pilot program of early vaccination programs in the first three weeks of November". I was tempted to exclaim, "*Early?*" but, instead, jumped at the opportunity to sign up for Halifax and Plympton.

Within an hour of the plans for Massachusetts's participants in this pilot program being sent off, I received the following message on our Health Alert Network: "Within the past 48 hours, however, we have been alerted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that adjustments are being made to the amount of vaccine that is expected to be available to states in October and November. Public and school based clinics tentatively scheduled for November should be postponed indefinitely pending the availability of more specific information about vaccine production."

I was incensed! “Adjustments”? “Postponed indefinitely”? I went to MDPH’s H1N1 blog and commented,

“This is not only discouraging news. It concerns me greatly that if a public statement is not made very quickly about this, people will, understandably, draw their own conclusions and when we leave room for that, we open the door to inaccuracies, misunderstandings and cynicism. Health agents have been taught to deliver accurate information ASAP to the public in order to avoid problems from becoming worse than they already are. Please urge CDC to come forward with reasons, explanations and plans.”

Did the “Whitehouse” (Just who is that, anyway?) not follow proper channels? Did they leave CDC out of the loop? I don’t know. I only know that this is a worldwide illness that is actually at epidemic levels among us now and while it may be considered to be mild compared to some illnesses, it is so widespread and our children, our next generation, our babies to our college students are most at risk. And, yet, we are not being told why there are delays in the production and delivery of the life-saving vaccine.

It might not be productive or even reasonable to demand vaccine, if everyone is already doing everything they can to produce it but we do have the right to demand answers and explanations.

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Please contact CDC to demand answers and explanations.

MDPH blog: <http://publichealth.blog.state.ma.us/h1n1-swine-flu/>

800-CDC-INFO

cdcinfo@cdc.gov